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Scottish Bird News

No 72 Jun. 2004

SEP 05 2004

(Dave Dick)

Wildlife Crime and Species Protection

Our opening picture (above) shows an attractive rural scene in Borders. Only the presence of the Crow Cage Trap spoils the view. Dave Dick, RSPB Scotland Senior Investigations Officer, explains the use and misuse of this device and also gives us some idea of the varied activities which can fill his typical day.

As I write this the breeding season for many of our birds is either well under way – Ravens, Eagles, Peregrines – or just starting, for Goshawk, Harriers and Osprey. These are the species which will fill my working life for the next 4 months.

A rising number of phone calls to my desk [or the ubiquitous mobile phone!] creates the usual stress of conflicting priorities – sightings of "suspicious characters" near nest sites, reports of dead Buzzards [are these road casualties, power line casualties or something more sinister?], journalists wanting details on wildlife crime for articles and requests for input to police training events.

In the background is the knowledge built up over many years of crime 'hotspots', the likelihood of repeat offences occurring makes any prolonged spell indoors nerve wracking!

Already we have had a report of the theft of Golden Eagle eggs from the Western Isles – the massive publicity response to this was almost embarrassing in its intensity. Having worked on eagles and eagle theft cases in that area I am braced for more reports – egg thieves will not travel such a distance for a single clutch – but so far no news is good news. Being a veteran of years when 11 Osprey nests were robbed and almost as many Golden Eagles, I find the reaction of the media and public very gratifying – there is no longer any need to explain why such attacks are indeed crimes.

Buzzard - a trap victim (Dave Dick)

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IT

This is the 'phoney war' period – expectations rise with reports of new pairs of Ospreys and Red Kites [sadly, almost never of new Golden Eagle pairs] and optimism flourishes within the birdwatching and professional conservation world. Odd sightings of Hen Harriers on southern upland moors are reported by the much more cautious and hardened raptor workers in those areas – who know from bitter experience that the chances of those birds being allowed to settle and breed successfully are thin indeed.

The other large area of work involves attending court cases. In all but the most rural areas of Scotland it now takes around a year for a trial to follow on a reported incident – Scottish courts are undoubtedly busier than ever before with all types of crime. Attending court can be a very rewarding or very frustrating experience and it can be very difficult to predict which type of day I will have. This unfortunately means that just at the time when fieldwork is essential we are forced to attend the end result of a year old piece of work – be it the identification of eggs in a police office or the filming of a gamekeeper shooting a Hen Harrier on a grouse moor. In order that the court gets the best quality of evidence possible, this can necessitate long hours writing expert witness statements on such matters as the breeding habits of Peregrine Falcons, feather and egg identification, 'record keeping' by egg thieves or the price of 'black market' poison.

Larsen Trap with a Magpie *(Dave Dick)*

Finally on to a subject with which I have become very familiar in recent years – crow cage traps and Larsen traps [see photos]. At every talk I give I always ask for a show of hands re knowledge of these traps – and am usually faced with rows of blank faces – little surprise then that when faced with one of these on a remote hill the average member of the public will be bemused and pick the phone up to the RSPB on their return. Walk-in crow cages are large mesh wire and wood structures with an entrance hole/funnel or series of holes to allow corvids entry to bait and/or a decoy crow already inside. When inside they cannot escape and are killed by the trap operator on his next visit. Larsen traps are smaller portable traps usually with three compartments, one containing a live corvid [usually a Crow or Magpie] but sometimes just bait and the other compartments being spring loaded to close behind any curious or aggressive corvid victim. Again these will be humanely destroyed by the trapper on his next visit.

Above is the 'ideal' situation – these traps are legal - however, there are, quite rightly, strict conditions governing there use and any variation or lapse can result in legal action being taken. The most common offence I see is the lack of consideration for the welfare of decoy birds – outside my RSPB remit until birds actually die but certainly of interest to other bodies. The provision of 'shelter' for decoys in many cases can only be described as negligible. My real interest however is in the 'by catch' of such traps as many Buzzards are caught in them. Also both traps can and do catch a huge variety of other species from Thrushes to Golden Eagles. I have received a great deal of information recently suggesting that some people routinely kill Buzzards trapped in this manner – real proof is as always difficult to obtain.

It is worth stating here that the majority of EU countries either outlaw such traps completely or have stringent rules over their use including official registration of individual traps. I have been told by conservationists from mainland Europe that they consider such traps to be outwith the EU Birds Directive as being "indiscriminate methods of capture" for wild birds. While their use in this country is still legal, those who use or promote the use of such traps should be aware that the interests of protected wildlife will not be considered secondary to so called 'vermin' control.

A reminder here that I realise I see the worst of what can happen to our wild birds in Scotland – there are many fantastic success stories occurring all around us – the sighting of a Buzzard above the RSPB offices in central Edinburgh was itself a cause for celebration this week – as they say on Crimewatch, "don't have nightmares!"

Dave Dick

Crow cage trap 'in situ' *(Dave Dick)*

Scottish Bird News
No 72 June 2004

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Contributions for the next issue of *SBN* should be submitted not later than 31st July 2004 to:

SBN Editor, SOC,
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Newhailes Road,
Musselburgh EH21 6SJ

Articles can be sent on disc or by e-mail (mail@the-soc.org.uk), although we do still accept typed or handwritten material.

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NEWS & NOTICES

Contact Cards

Throughout the summer and early autumn, many of us will be birdwatching in the better weather and enjoying walks in the countryside, the hills or on the coast. Nearly all SOC members, I'm sure, regularly carry their binoculars on these outings, either alone or with family or friends. Seeing someone else wearing binoculars when you're out and about is often an invitation to ask "Seen much today?"

Lots of new friendships and acquaintances have been made this way. It's often a good time to tell fellow walkers about the SOC and its meetings, excursions, and now, its new Resource Centre. Face to face, informal meetings in the field are a great opportunity to help the SOC to recruit new members to your local Branch.

In this month's mailing you will find two sample introductory cards, personalised for your own Branch, to which you can add your own contact details, or your local Branch Secretary's details. Can I suggest that the next time you're out on a birding walk, that you take them with you and give them out if you can. Your Branch Secretary will also be sent a large batch and if you need more you can ask them for as many as you think you can give away.

Interested in seeing birds in Scotland? Join SOC and link up with local birdwatchers in your area.
HIGHLAND SOC
is always pleased to welcome new members to its evening meetings and excursions
LOCAL CONTACT
PHONE NO
EMAIL
LOCAL WEBSITE
FOR A FREE INFORMATION PACK CONTACT SOC HQ AT
HARBOUR POINT, NEWHAILES ROAD, MUSSELBURGH EH21 6SJ
Tel: 0131 653 0653 (until March 05) email: mail@the-soc.org.uk
MAIN SOC WEBSITE: WWW.THE-SOC.ORG.UK

Who knows what sort of friendships will be formed? At the same time the Club might just start to see a real increase in membership numbers over the summer. The aim is to show what a nice bunch we are, so you don't need to give them the hard sell, just tell them how much the Club has given you over the years. The card then gives them an easy prompt to make the appropriate contact. Good luck!

Bill Gardner

Daphne in her garden *(Vicky McLellan)*

The '200 CLUB' & Daphne Peirse - Duncombe

About to start its 16th year on 1st June, our 200 Club, originally the brainwave of Daphne and her late husband Alastair, was designed to raise funds for the SOC at No 21 Regent Terrace. Over the years some £28,000 pounds has been raised, approximately half going in prizes every month and the rest to various projects.

More recently, acquisitions have included an Apple G4 Powerbook, a new computer for the office and a digital projector. Initially funds were devoted to more modest items required at No 21 such as an electric kettle, curtains and carpets and it is hoped that monies can be used towards future furnishing of the new Waterston House.

How remarkable that those two members could raise such a vast sum for the Club and how lucky we are that Daphne is happy to continue this valuable service for the SOC – quietly efficient and always with such characteristic grace. Grateful thanks from us all, Daphne, for all your generous efforts.

(You can help merely by joining the 200 Club at £12 per year. For details of how to join see below after the list of recent winners.)

Information from ***Vicky McLellan***

200 Club

The latest prize winners are: **February 2004** – 1st £30 M Nicholl; 2nd £20 D.G. Walker; 3rd £10 J.S. Wilson. **March 2004** – 1st £30 Miss E.James; 2nd £20 J.N. Schofield; 3rd £10 Mrs. Ingham. **April 2004** – 1st £30 Mrs. E. Russell; 2nd £20 Mrs. J. Denny; 3rd £10 Prof. Grist. Please note that the 'new year' starts in June and any new members would be very welcome. Please contact me at Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire, TD6 9NH

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe

Election of New Member for SBRC

One member of SBRC retires annually by rotation and Colin Crooke is due to retire this year. Nominations to fill the vacancy are invited and should be submitted to Ron Forrester (address below) by 30th June, signed by a proposer and a seconder, both of whom must be SOC members. If there is more than one nomination a postal ballot will take place in which all SOC Local Recorders will each have one vote.

In order to ensure that there is a replacement SBRC always put forward a nomination and on this occasion Alan Brown is our candidate. Alan, who lives in East Lothian, served a term on SBRC from 1984 – 1992 and has since been a member of BBRC. So far nobody has served a second term on SBRC but we consider his experience would be a considerable asset to the committee. As is always the case we encourage additional nominations.

Ron Forrester
Secretary, SBRC, The Gables, Eastlands Road, Rothesay, Isle of Bute PA20 9JZ

Money, money, money.....

If you have a good idea for an ornithological project next year but feel inhibited by its costs, then don't despair - throw your inhibitions to the wind, cast off your cloak of doubt, and apply for an SOC Research Grant. SOC Research Grants are financed by the SOC Endowment Fund and are available to amateur individuals and groups working to further the knowledge of Scottish birds or to contribute to their conservation. Priority in the awarding of grants is given to SOC members and branches but applications are considered from any individual or group pursuing the above goals.

Projects must relate to the study of Scottish birds and are assessed for funding (by the Research & Surveys Committee) according to their ornithological merit and the likelihood of their objectives being met. SOC Research Grants should be viewed as sources of extra reasonable funding for expenses incurred for travel or accommodation or particular equipment. The available total amount available in recent years has been between £1500 and £2500. More details can be found in an information leaflet available from the SOC HQ.

In the last few years grants have been awarded for studies of, among other projects, Rhum Manx Shearwaters, Icelandic Greylags, Clyde Eiders, Aberdeen Oystercatchers, Purple Sandpipers in Iceland, Handa Skuas, Forth Terns, seabirds on Sule Skerry and Treshnish Isles, Galloway Barn Owls, Glasgow Swifts, autumn White Wagtails, Ring Ouzels in Morocco, and Twite and Ring Ouzels in Grampian.

Grants are available for up to three years, but renewals are dependent on the production of satisfactory annual progress reports to be submitted by 31 December of each year. However, since "there's no such thing as a free lunch", grant recipients are required to deposit a report of their project in the SOC Library, and are encouraged to write an article on their study for *SBN* followed by a paper for *Scottish Birds* if appropriate to the study.

If you are interested in this generous offer, why not request an information leaflet and application form from Caroline Scott at HQ... and don't forget to apply by 31st January!

Tom Dougall
for Research & Surveys Committee
(currently Michael Bell, Thomas Daniels, Tom Dougall, Raymond Duncan, Norman Elkins, Les Hatton and Mark Holling).

Start of Aberlady Project

On a sunny day on the 29th March 2004, at Craigielaw, Aberlady, the President of the SOC, Mark Holling, invited the Earl of Wemyss and March to cut the first sod to mark the start of construction of the new Scottish Birdwatching Resource Centre. The ceremony was attended by 25 people from the local community, along with various SOC members, including two keen ornithologists, who had visited the Bay for the last 50 years, Keith MacGregor and Frank Hamilton.

Keith Mcgregor and Frank Hamilton
(Jimmy Maxwell)

The site, with its panoramic views of the Bay at Craigielaw, had originally been suggested to Bill Gardner and Brian Downing, at a meeting on the Estate with Mr Martin Andrew, factor for Wemyss & March, in early 2001. The SOC is pleased that the Earl of Wemyss and March was able to sell us this excellent site and grateful for all the practical help given by his staff. Lord Wemyss was well acquainted with George

Lord and Lady Wemyss with Mark Holling
(Jimmy Maxwell)

Waterston, via Fair Isle, and interestingly opened 21 Regent Terrace in 1959.

The turf cutting event was covered in both the local papers and brought together SOC members, staff, local community councillors and key sponsors, such as Mr Geoff Ball, Chairman of CALA Homes, who together, are supporting the project with a £20,000 donation.

Our building Contractors John Dennis & Co Ltd, and Architect, Jenny Humpreys were also there to celebrate the start of the project and explain how the building will be finished by the Spring of 2005. After the photography and speeches tea and coffees were served in the new Craigielaw Golf Clubhouse giving everyone a preview of the elevated views across the Forth which visitors to our new HQ will enjoy in 2005.

Bill Gardner

The working team for Waterston House
(Ann Gardner)

Birds of the Fetternear Trust

A copy of a booklet *A Checklist of the Birds of the Fetternear Estate* has been received by SOC and is held at Headquarters.

New Members

We welcome the following new members to the Club – **Ayrshire:** Mr. Eric Roxburgh, Dr. Richard Cowley **Central Scotland:** Mr. Lindsay Corbett **Clyde:** Mr. William Youngman **Dumfries:** Mark & Jenny Pollitt **Fife:** Robert and Brenda Muir **Grampian:** Mr. Ian Moig, Ms. Ethel Aberdein, Toni & Joyce Asher, Ms. Jenny Lennon **Highland:** Mr. David Metcalfe, Mr. Robert F. Waterston **Lothian:** Mr. David Edgar, Mr. Brian W Goodacre, Mr. Tom Lawrie, Harry & Marie Bowles, Ms. Grace McKinnon **Stewartry:** Jeremy & Jeanette Brock, Mr. Douglas Bremner **Tayside:** Prof Robin Hull. **Also:** Mrs. Mary Gregory

Waterson House Update

As of the end of the first week of May, the building contractors had not got on site, partly due to minor legal complications between the SOC's constitution and the conditions of the sale. These were likely to be resolved in June.

In late April I visited the premises of Carpenter Oak and Woodland Ltd, near Kirriemuir, to see the final touches being put to the massive Douglas Fir frame which will be at the heart of the new 3500 sq. ft. building. I have never seen bigger pieces of finished timber! Some are 30 feet long, 12" thick and 18" deep, all cut by James Jones Ltd's yard, also at Kirriemuir. There are only four metal bolts in the entire superstructure, everything else being held together with traditional Oak pegs and Oak fish plates, using a bewildering number of impressively complex and well crafted joints. The frame timbers will be finally planed and coated in linseed oil, for protection, before shipping the 40 tons of timber to the site on two low loaders, sometime in August.

Mr. M. Leslie (J. Jones) with Bill Gardner

The 8-meter high, two-storey frame will be erected in under a week using a large mobile crane – the operation will certainly be worth a visit. All of this would not be possible without the remarkable help from the Forestry Commission, Scotland, who sourced the timber from their forests and persuaded their contacts in the Scottish Timber industry to also help SOC with its new HQ.

SOC Council will shortly ratify a Concordat between the SOC and the Forestry Commission in Scotland and this will probably be signed when the frame is being raised in late August. Further details of this agreement will be publicised in a subsequent issue of *SBN*.

On the fundraising side, I was particularly pleased that the appeal we sent out with the March mailing of *SBN* was immediately and very generously supported by the SOC membership. In the first eight weeks, about 100 donations have brought in over £10,000 to HQ, with many people identifying an area where they would like to see their gift applied, either, for the building furnishings/equipment, interpretation material, or landscaping. If you would like to make a donation to help the project, please use the form mailed with your last SBN or phone myself or Caroline at HQ on 031 653 0653.

Quite a few members have also written in suggesting individuals that they know, who also might be interested in the new project and I am grateful for these suggestions. Similarly other members, for example Brian Smith, from Dumfries Branch, gave me a lead for Pilkingtons, which I followed up by sending them full details of our Club and the project. Last Friday I received a call from their marketing group saying they were indeed interested in supporting the project and have asked for more details.

I do not know of any other major capital project which has been so well supported by gifts in kind. It is really remarkable how much of the fabric of the building has been donated. The concrete base, from Lafarge Cement at Dunbar; the timber frame and cladding, from FCS; the roof and wall insulation from Superglass in Stirling; the hardwood flooring from Russwood in Newtonmore, not to mention the tiles from Redland Roofing, and the boilers from Worcester Bosch - the building will literally have kindness built in ! Almost all of these gifts have been secured, by phone, through good desk research, applied logic and a great deal of luck and a lot of persistence! As my Mum always used to say, "If you don't ask, you don't get".

This is a major achievement for the Club to mobilise such support across Scotland from the construction industry. These companies can justly feel proud that their gifts will help the SOC grow in strength and stature from this new base. In turn this will help us help more people to enjoy and study birds and create new partnerships with organisations, from voluntary organisations to Government. The new building and its new activities and outreach will, I believe, transform the Club's prospects for the future.

Stephanie (carpenter) with the kingpost for Waterston House *(Bill Gardner)*

The next fundraising phase is to tackle agencies such as Scottish Natural Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund, plus charitable trusts, to get them to join in and help us make the building the best it can be and assist in the growth of the Club with help for new activities across Scotland.

The next update should feature pictures of the frame, as its being built, and indicate progress on additional funding bids. These are primarily for two new staff members to help us make the best use of the building and the unique resources that it will contain. It will certainly be an interesting summer.

Bill Gardner
SOC Development Manager

News from SOC Council

SOC Council is the club's committee responsible for discussing and agreeing policy for taking the club forward, and for overseeing the work of the other SOC committees to which certain areas are delegated, e.g. Library Committee and Regional Committee. Meetings are held every quarter, and for the last few years have been held in a reasonably 'central' venue, at Stirling. Over the last year, the decisions relating to the design and costs of Waterston House have of necessity taken up a large part of these meetings. At the last meeting in May, other topics aired included reviewing the club accounts, how to progress possible future affiliations between Scottish bird clubs, and the Club's internal business plan.

Three significant decisions were made affecting some of the other work within the SOC. Our relationship with the Forestry Commission, who have been so generous in providing materials for Waterston House, was confirmed in a concordat. Support for the *Birds of Scotland 3* project was confirmed – significant efforts are ongoing by many of Scotland's ornithological experts in producing a worthy successor to the previous published reviews of Scotland's birds. (More on this project can be read elsewhere in this issue). Council will keep regular communication with the editorial team to ensure financial viability and also close co-operation with other projects where appropriate. Lastly, Council confirmed that the SOC will be the Scottish partners in the next national bird atlas project to be organised by the BTO (fieldwork starts in 2007).

Mark Holling, SOC President

SOC Conference Questionnaire

At the last Annual Conference in November 2003, Caroline Scott, the SOC Administrative Officer distributed a questionnaire to the 137 delegates. There were 5 specific questions and a space for comment and suggestions. A summary of the responses received is shown below. A total of 60 questionnaires were returned of which 34 included comments.

1. *In the last 10 years, approximately how often have you attended Annual Conference?*

1–3 times	14/60	(23%)
4–6 times	15/60	(25%)
7–10 times	31/60	(52%)

Clearly the Conference has some very long-standing supporters. Not surprisingly comments from the 52% of regular attendees said they were satisfied with the hotel and general location.

2. *When you attend the Conference do you:*

a) stay at venue
b) come for a day
c) stay nearby

42/60 stayed at the venue, most of the remainder choosing to stay nearby.

3. *What factor most influences your decision to attend an SOC Conference? Delegates were asked to rank various factors 1–6*

33/60 said that the Conference programme/ speakers were the most important factor with 20/60 giving socialising/meeting people as their most important factor. Between them these two factors were by far the most important. The other factors – good birding locally, location of venue, good transport links and quality of accommodation generally were much less important.

4. *Approximately how far are you willing to travel to an SOC Conference?*

0–49 miles	*1/60*
50–99 miles	*13/60*
100+ miles	*47/60 (78%)*

Clearly, delegates are generally quite prepared to travel 50+ miles to attend Conference. The list of delegates and their home location revealed that attendees came from all over Scotland with a few from England.

5. *Would you still consider attending SOC Annual Conference if it was in the spring rather than in the autumn?*

40/60 (67%) said they would whilst 20/60 (33%) would not.

6. *Comments.*

Many attendees praised the Balavil Sport Hotel and the staff and wanted the Conference to remain there. There was also much comment (criticism) about the P.A. system and poor sound production. My favourite comment (anonymous) was as follows: "Subsidise a group of PhD students to give the programme. It might attract other young students to attend. The Conference takes on more and more the appearance of an old folk's convention. As an octogenarian I find this depressing"!

Summary

It is clear that of those attending Annual Conferences many have done so for a number of years and are quite prepared to drive a reasonable distance even in early November. The overall impression is that those attending are happy with the venue and the programmes. This is hardly surprising. Whilst some 125 SOC members attended, this represents only 6.6 % of the total membership of 1900. What I am anxious to establish is why more people do not attend. I offer a few possible suggestions:

Cost: The Annual Conference this year was £128 for the whole weekend. The Scottish Ringers Conference cost £79 and the BTO Conference at Swanwick cost £125 for similar facilities. At £250 plus a few drinks and transport for a couple it's quite an expensive 48 hours.

Programme: If the Conference has a distinct theme (Picturing Birds 2003) some will simply not attend if it doesn't interest them. An alternative would be to have a varied programme and even have some smaller groups/talks back-to-back to increase choice.

Timing/Venue: The autumn timing is only 3 weeks before the Scottish Ringers Conference (quite a few of whom are SOC members) and a couple of weeks before the BTO Conference. The current venue is central and accessible from the A9. Rail links are not particularly good. The Newtonmore venue is such that hardly anyone attends for just a day. Relocating near to a centre such as Perth, Stirling, Glasgow or Edinburgh might enable more people to attend for a day or a half-day.

What next?

It would be very helpful in planning future Conferences to get feedback from branches/members as to why they don't attend, or only rarely attend, Annual Conference. I am aware that we have a loyal core of delegates whose thoughts have been expressed through the questionnaire, but am very keen to ascertain why so many members don't attend.

I would be glad to receive comments/suggestions and feedback from local branches and/or individuals.

Andrew Thorpe, SOC Council
e-mail: Andrewthorpe4@aol.com

SOC/BTO Birdwatching Conference 2004 – Stirling University

On a grey, overcast March Saturday morning, SOC President, Mark Holling, welcomed 136 delegates to the 2004 SOC/BTO Birdwatching Conference at Stirling University. The theme of this year's event was 'Grassroots Birding' and the planned programme was a good reflection of this theme.

The day's talks were opened by Bob Furness of Glasgow University who has spent 33 years ringing Skuas. His presentation however, was on the more advanced technique of satellite tracking, a sophisticated way of establishing behaviour and specialisation patterns of individual birds; the rationale is environmental change, especially regarding fish stocks with increases in sand eels and the decrease in cod. Satellite work is costly, £2000 for the transmitter and $10 a day for the data. Fitting of the harness and transmitter does have adverse effects on the birds and can cause distress, with consequent impact on breeding results. Bob is now changing over to 'data-loggers' which do not have these drawbacks and with appropriate development may give better quality data when used with Great Skuas. He gave an example of these birds being tracked wintering in West Africa, very probably as a result of fishing agreements between Spain and the West African countries. It was a splendid opening to the Conference and set the standard for the day.

Bob Furness chats to Dick Vernon (Jimmy Maxwell)

The best laid plans do not always materialise and so it proved when John Calladine from BTO Scotland was ill. Chris Wernham was able to make the presentation as she had been involved in the project that formed the basis of the presentation "Local movements of farmland seed eaters: contributing to their practical conservation". The work had taken place in a study area in West Fife near Dunfermline and due tribute was paid to the Tay Ringing Group for their work. The study species were three granivores, Tree Sparrow, Yellowhammer

and Chaffinch and Chris set out the short- and medium-term measures for conserving these farmland birds. Methods used in the study were mist-netting, plumage colouring (not successful), radio telemetry and conventional ringing. Chris made the point that technical aspects are complementary to, not a substitute for, bird observation.

In the study area there were a large amount of stubble and sown crops. As an example of the birds studied there was the Yellowhammer - 232 captures, 21 recaptures and only 6 movements. Movement between the study area sites was interesting with a range between 0.1% and 37%. Birds were much more dispersed during the winter of 2003–2004. One Yellowhammer moved 25kms from the study area to Chris Wenham's garden which was one of the largest movements in the UK! She has had up to 125 Yellowhammers in her garden.

Results of the study should help to recommend agri-environment measures and the plan of the research is to have one more year in the West Fife study area and then expand to contrasting study areas. Other areas for study are the influence of baiting on movements (experimental protocols), modelling of implications for the design and the take-up of agri-environment incentives (Rural Stewardship Scheme).

Andy Thorpe of The North Sea Bird Club was also indisposed and unable to make the planned presentation on the North Sea as a local patch and so it was another BTO stalwart, Andy Wilson, who presented a substitute talk on 'BTO Garden Birdwatch' (What is more grass roots than that?). Andy Wilson gave a historical background to Garden Bird Watch (GBW) by looking at the Common Bird Census and BBS and showing how more information was needed and how important gardens really were in this. Among the statistics quoted were that House Sparrow numbers are down 90% in Princes Street Gardens, Edinburgh with similar declines being recorded in Glasgow but birds in villages are doing better than birds in towns.

There are now almost 18000 participants (largest BTO Survey) with more than 1000 gardens in Scotland and a very good distribution. Again an impressive set of results were shown including that Yellowhammers are only in 5% of gardens where they move to in late winter/early spring; Goldfinch, from November to February, showed a decline in farmland but an increase in gardens, and the House Sparrow was in more than 98% of gardens in the Northern and Western Isles, fewer than 70% in Central Belt gardens but more than 50 % of gardens in Edinburgh.

Bill Gardner discusses Waterston House with delegates *(Jimmy Maxwell)*

Andy demonstrated the GBW Website with its on-line features providing a personal database for participants with the growth of the number of on-line submissions. Participants are able to find out what other people are recording in their local area.

The surprise of the morning was introduced by Brian Smith, Chairman for the session, but the programme merely said "Birding at Kirkudbright – Andrew Wiles". Brian introduced Andrew as an example of the young people that we need to continue the bird watching activities once the older ones amongst us are unable to do so. Andrew is 16 years old and made a very interesting presentation of a wide range of species using some of his outstanding photographs (the 'worst' one of a Snowy Egret [first record for mainland Scotland – what an achievement!] was taken by his father much to everyone's amusement!). He displayed considerable knowledge which belied his young years.

President, Mark Holling, with Andrew Wiles *(Jimmy Maxwell)*

Not just interested in birds as a spectacle, he was able to recount those species that had bred recently including many behavioural details in the process. Obviously an enthusiastic and regular bird watcher with excellent recognition skills, he knew the habitat of his local patch extremely well. Andrew held the audience's attention and there was very warm and prolonged applause at the end of his 15-minute session.

The final session before lunch was presented by the Chair of the RSPB Committee for Scotland, Pam Pumphrey who remarked that RSPB has now been working in Scotland for 100 years. She emphasised that this year is the 50th anniversary of the return of the Osprey to Loch Garten and that there were viewing opportunities of other species via webcam with the examples of White-tailed Eagles (Rhum) and Black-throated Divers. Pam also mentioned the Volunteer & Farmer Alliance that was helping to redress the decline in farmland birds. The session ended in controversy following a question about widening the access to bird watching and the RSPB's role especially concerning urban reserves.

The first session after lunch was presented by the Secretary of the Scottish Raptor Study Group, Patrick Stirling-Aird, whose topic was 'Evolution of Scotland's Raptor Study Groups'. Raptor Study Groups (RSGs) started in 1980 in NE Scotland & Highland and there are now nine individual RSGs across Scotland which conduct primarily breeding season surveys/activity, for example checking nests/sector occupancies. Originally the groups only covered Peregrine and Golden Eagle but now include Hen Harrier and Merlin. The end users of the information are Scottish Natural Heritage and the Scottish Executive which have a legal duty to report on the state of raptors.

Patrick Stirling-Aird sorting slides (Jimmy Maxwell)

RSGs became involved with conservation and in 1995 the Raptor Conservation Group was formed and its report made 25 recommendations including a need for more coordinated monitoring. Patrick showed the work of the RSG in the field using the example of Peregrine monitoring in a study area in Perthshire. Patrick's personal theory (unproved) is that the white breast of the male peregrine acts as a form of territory protection against other male Peregrines. He believed that the hill-walker impact on Golden Eagles was seriously underestimated. Among the interesting statistics quoted were that Golden Eagle numbers in UK are up 90% but in North and Western Scotland they are down 38%.

From the uplands it was down to the sea shore for the next presentation by Ken Bruce with his talk on 'Waders on the Solway'. Ken showed, through a series of slides, the use of cannon nets for the counting of Oystercatchers. Young people are allowed to release the ringed birds – a unique way of interesting them in the process. The ringing showed that in the case of the Oystercatcher, most of the Solway birds are recovered in the Faeroes whilst Ringed Plovers from the Solway have been recovered in Iceland, Greenland and Norway; Sanderling have

Oystercatcher (Jimmy Maxwell)

been traced to Morocco, Mauretania and Gambia and the Dunlins have ventured as far as Scandinavia, Poland and southern Europe. A Turnstone decline seems apparent as very few are now caught. Returning to the Oystercatcher Ken showed a series of distressing slides where the impact of sheep wool on the birds often resulted in toe and leg amputation. In one instance some 30% of adult birds had been affected.

Norman Elkins in good form (Jimmy Maxwell)

Breeding Bird Atlases are now a much more common feature of the literature and most regions are making strenuous efforts to produce their own or to update previous editions. The next speaker, Norman Elkins, is already very well known in the Scottish ornithological scene for his expertise on the effect of weather on bird movements. His topic for the Conference however, was an insight into the background of the recently published Fife Bird Atlas and he began by highlighting a selection of species covering the most interesting information. A series of slides showed the range of habitats in this popular bird watching area.

Norman pointed out that Fife has 70% of land under agriculture. Among the key facts highlighted were:

- *Shag* numbers (Isle of May) have not recovered from the huge drop in 1993;
- *Buzzard* numbers had grown from seven in 1984 to a current level of about 300 pairs;
- *Goosanders* are present from May to October but there has not been any proved breeding to date;
- *Crossbill* had shown a high irruption between June 1997 and May 1998; and
- *Corn Bunting* had shown a decline in singing males.

For presenters and delegates alike the final talk of the day is usually regarded as the 'graveyard shift' and the least enticing; usually it is the excuse to leave early for the journey home and that (oh so convenient) other commitment. Not on this occasion, though! Stuart Rivers' description of the lead up to and experience of his autumn trip to Barra last year kept everyone on their seats and laughing at the telling of it all.

Migrants and vagrants were the real motivation for the visit to Barra and Stuart gave the background to this choice of island in the Outer Hebrides. There was a process of elimination plus study of the Western Isles/Outer Hebrides Bird Report with Barra having a lower level of coverage than other islands. Stuart's description of all the rare birds encountered reminded us of the kind of days we all dream about.

The trip had widened the range of birds on the island which had, in Stuart's view, most likely been under-recorded. It was the ideal talk to end a most interesting day; other organisers please note! Throughout the day there had been a constant buzz that showed that the Conference was very worthwhile and if you missed this event then set next March aside ready for the one in 2005. This was a model of a good and enjoyable Conference; although it took place on the 13th, those who were there were certainly lucky that day.

Stuart Rivers in mid-anecdote (Jimmy Maxwell)

Brian Cartwright

The Nuthatch in Scotland - part 2

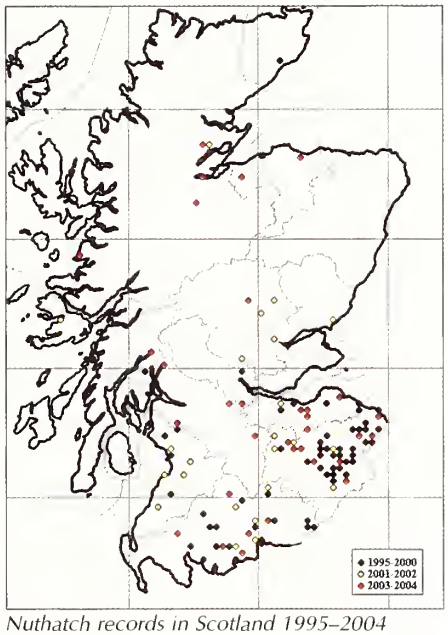
(Ray Murray)

This is the second of two articles covering the current spread of Nuthatches in Scotland. In the last article, the period 1995–2000 was covered. Now, with area reports, information requested from local Recorders and sightings from our own membership, we see what has happened since. Interestingly, there was an attempted introduction of the Nuthatch in Scotland last century. The Duke of Argyll obtained "a good many birds in pairs" from a Brighton dealer and released them at Inveraray. None were ever seen again.

Ah well! In the map below, all the previous sightings for 1995–2000 are now shown in black. New ones for 2001–2 are in yellow, and those for 2003–4 in red. The area boundaries are again included to give us a more accurate idea of the spread into each county.

2001–2

After its previous increase, **Borders,** the main Scottish breeding area, levelled off with hardly any difference in numbers of sites for 2001, although 13 new (yellow)sites replace others unreported. Notable range extensions were to the west at Peebles and Broughton Place and in the north at Earlston and Mellerstain. In 2002, site numbers rose by 10 to 45 with a substantial increase at the Monteviot/Folly/Peniel Heugh area. **D&G** noted 16 sites in 2001 (up 3) with range expansion to Beattock and Moffat – nests were seen at Garroch Glen and Livingstone,(Loch Ken). 2002 shows a huge increase in the Moffat area with birds also at Cowhill, Dalbeattie and Tynron. **Ayrshire** reports remained fairly stable with 4 sightings in 2001, at Dunduff,(south of Ayr), Coylton, Stanecastle,(Irvine) and Failford. But in 2002 sightings dwindled to only one in June at Asselfoot, (south of Girvan). However, Arran (**Clyde Islands**) had a first record in 2001 with a Nuthatch appearing at Achencairn, and next year, one at Corrie - possibly the same bird or perhaps the one that was previously heard at Glen Ashdale? **Lothian** after its earlier success had a blank year and then a single report of a Nuthatch in 2002 at Corstorphine Hill. Our species is spreading northward – **Perth & Kinross** enter the stakes with a Nuthatch being brought in by a cat at Dunkeld ! In 2002, reports come from 3 sites – Blackford, Perth and one at Bridge of Cally in Oct. of that year. **Angus & Dundee** also show a new yellow dot appearing on the map in 2001 with a bird at Craigmill Den (near Carnoustie). Since this third record, no Nuthatches have been seen. Across the country westward however, another island Nuthatch visitor is seen on Mull near Gruline (Argyll) in 2001. Lastly, **Highland** produce our most northerly sighting with a May 2002 record from Ardross, Easter Ross.

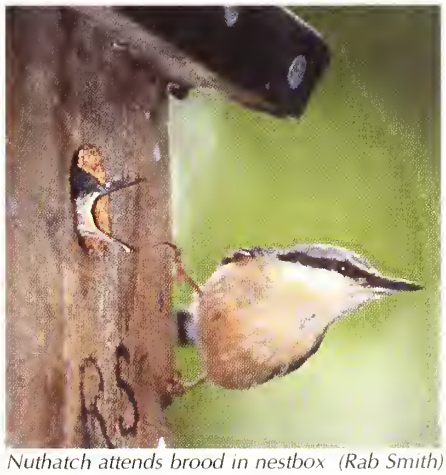


Nuthatch records in Scotland 1995–2004

2003–4

In **D&G**, the Moffat/Beattock area again dominates in Nuthatch sites. Wood of Cree has its first ever record in 2003 and reports also come from Mabie Forest, Sandyhills and New Abbey. Susan White kindly wrote to me about finding a pair at Carstramon Woods near Gatehouse and records from Threave and Lochmabon continue into Feb. 2004. In 2003, many **Borders** established sites continue to hold Nuthatches and I find 17 new sites in the records which now appear in red. Four pairs are listed for Drygrange with single pairs at Jenny's Brae and Bowhill. Other new territories are at Traquair House, Millbank, Ayton and Rosetta. 2004 shows 3 new sites at Heriot School, Gala Swimming pool and Velvethall. **Ayrshire,** possibly due to lack of coverage, reports only one 2004 Nuthatch at Kilkerran, where their very first bird originally appeared. **Clyde** has at last entered the lists with 2003 producing the species at Arrocher and Loch Winnoch (a memorable sighting by a youth group) and also the first Lanarkshire bird near Carnwath in April 2004 ! **Lothian**'s red dots on the map mark a bird at Dalkeith C.Pk. and another at Vogrie C. Pk., which stayed through the winter into 2004. Nuthatches were singing at Smeaton and Biel (both near E.Linton) and one was at Torphicen this April. **Forth**'s only record for 2003 was sent to me by Tom Finlay, a farmer near Slamannan, who had one at his garden feeder. Across in **Argyll** a Nuthatch turns up at a feeder in Cairndow, Cowal . Heading north again, **Perth & Kinross** have 2003 sightings again at Perth in Jan. and also at Balnaguard in May. Further north, **Murray & Nairn** enter our picture for the first time with a Feb. 2003 sighting at Mosstodloch(Fochabers). Lastly, **Highland** again figures in the ratings with 2003 records at Arisaig and Beauly, and in 2004, more Nuthatches at Drumnadrochit in Feb. and Cawdor in April.

You can now see from the map that our Nuthatch spread has extended much further northwards in the last 4 years. An interesting letter came to me from Rab Smith (Dumfries SOC) , who in 2003 was attending to his Pied Flycatcher nest-boxes up the Scaur Water near Penpont, when he found one with the lid plastered over with mud (see photo). The box contained 8 young Nuthatches nestling in a bed of dry rotten wood. These were duly ringed and all fledged successfully. Rab is keen to learn whether this is a first record of nest-box Nuthatch ringing in Scotland. Is it ? The latest sighting has just come in from Neil Wilson from Boath (at 800 ft. altitude on the river Alness) who had a Nuthatch at his feeder only a month ago – yet another red dot for Highland!



Nuthatch attends brood in nestbox (Rab Smith)

My grateful thanks to all who wrote with information and to all the Recorders I badgered for their data. A more careful and accurate picture of Nuthatch holding in Scotland will emerge from official sources in due course – this has been merely a taster of the current spread – I hope, an enjoyable one.

Jimmy Maxwell

Windfarms and Birds in Scotland

Wind Turbine in action *(Ian Francis)*

One of the most contentious land use questions in Scotland is the siting and construction of new windfarms. Government commitments to reduce fossil fuel use and generate an increasing proportion of electricity from wind turbines have led to hundreds of site searches and, increasingly, planning applications across Scotland. Many of these are in upland areas, particularly in the western and northern Highlands, but in future years emphasis is likely to shift offshore. Many arguments are being aired about impacts on landscapes and wilderness, but possible effects on birds are usually raised in the case of almost every new windfarm. Is this one of the greatest threats to birds seen in the country for decades? Is it another example of an unregulated rush for development, similar to cage fish farming or blanket forestry, and will the negative effects only become apparent when many new sites are operational? Or are the threats and likely impacts exaggerated? Will our birds live with windfarms, just as they appear to have done with electricity pylons? Do we even have enough knowledge to answer these questions? And are we letting 'local' ornithological distractions get in the way of tackling the biggest global threat of all - climate change?

In this issue of Scottish Bird News, *we have invited three contributions to this debate, each offering a different perspective on the issue. We would be delighted to hear from SOC members in future issues, especially if new information and observations on effects on birds in Scotland can be offered. Please write to the editors (SOC HQ).*

Wind-farms and Birds No 1 - a problem waiting to happen?

Until recently I had thought that wind-powered electricity generation was a good thing. I had seen turbines on Orkney and Fair Isle and a larger group by the M6 motorway in Cumbria. In small numbers they really didn't seem too bad. However, recently there was a proposal for about 50 to be built at Blackhills (just south of Peterhead) and also the suggestion of a large number in Aberdeen Bay. I decided that I really ought to look into the subject in more detail.

My research produced some interesting facts, the most amazing of which was that all these wind-farms would not result in a single 'fossil fuel' power station being shut down! They have to be kept ticking over in case there is a lull in the wind or a surge in demand, such as tea making in the middle of Coronation Street! Apparently, when there are surges in power demand like these, wind turbines are not able to produce the goods, so relying on other power stations to provide the necessary electricity.

The construction of the wind generators is also not environmentally friendly because the manufacture of cement to make the giant towers produces large amounts of CO_2, which is exactly what they are trying to prevent. Also the noise they make probably affects humans more than wildlife but it can certainly be very intrusive.

The size of the larger ones is pretty impressive with blade spans of 100 metres mounted on 120 metre high towers. The maximum lifespan of a turbine is estimated (by the manufacturers) to be around 20 years, but the regular maintenance required is bound to cause major disturbance to wildlife, both on and offshore.

The real problem for birds is caused by these massive rotating blades. It doesn't take much imagination to picture what they would do to a passing skein of geese. At Navarre in the Spanish Pyrenees, where over 300 wind turbines are located, it is reported that they have killed up to 7,000 birds. Confirmed kills included over 400 Griffon Vultures plus other raptors including Golden Eagles and Booted Eagles. In the USA at the Altamont Pass Wind Resource Area, things are even worse, with an annual mortality rate of up to 1,300 raptors. This site was unfortunately set up in a major migration route and despite continued attempts by environmentalists to get the owners to rectify the situation birds are still being killed in large numbers.

In the UK there are far few large raptors and there is very little noticeable migration so they are unlikely to suffer. Over here the main problem will be swans and geese both onshore and offshore and seaducks and seabirds, such as Gannets and Cormorants offshore. At Blyth in Northumberland, a flock of Eiders was killed when the birds flew into wind turbines in poor visibility.

Griffon Vulture *(Jimmy Maxwell)*

In North-East Scotland there are very large flocks of Eiders and scoters and plenty of poor visibility, with 'haar' often being present for days on end. There is also the passage of thousands of geese in spring and autumn plus a few hundred Whooper Swans. There are few years when I haven't seen geese flying past, just offshore, in poor visibility. The proposed site in Aberdeen Bay would be a disaster and could do untold damage. Any large wind-farms will have to be very carefully sited and just moving them out of sight further offshore will not help the birds - it will just hide the evidence.

Here on the east coast, autumn sees the arrival of smaller migrants like Redwings and Fieldfares which come over from Scandinavia in their millions. There is no information on the effect of wind turbines on smaller birds but I can guarantee that it will not be to their advantage!

There is also the effect that wind turbines have on their surroundings. Onshore many are being proposed on moorland or low grade farmland, both important nesting areas for such endangered birds as Lapwings and Skylarks. It is very unlikely that these species would continue to utilise habitat surrounded by dozens of turbines.

Offshore, the disturbance to the seabed would be considerable initially but should have less impact over time (although what happens when the turbines reach the end of their working life remains to be seen). Those located in feeding areas for seabirds would almost certainly drive the birds away as has been proven in Denmark where enormous offshore wind turbines are avoided by birds. They may not be killed, but wind farms may sterilise large areas of potential feeding grounds. Also, due to their size they must have warning lights which could well attract tired migrants towards them, with potentially fatal results.

There has to be a better solution and I suggest that sea power would be a better option. The tide comes in and out twice a day every day and there is no shortage of waves around the UK. I also recently read an article suggesting that all new houses should have solar panels fitted during construction. Even in Scotland this could reduce their electricity demand by up to 20% per annum. Wind generators will provide electricity some of the time but no fossil fuel power stations will be shut down. They are inefficient, intrusive and a definite hazard to birdlife. The bottom line is that, despite all the hype, wind farms are about as environmentally unfriendly as you can get! They will prove to be a major 'white elephant' in the years to come and should be opposed wherever possible.

Whooper Swans *(Arthur Grosset)*

Tim Marshall, Longside, Peterhead.
Ludquharn@aol.com

References.

Most of this information has been obtained from www.safewind.info, which I can highly recommend for more detailed information. Also www.biological-diversity.org will update you on the raptor mortality at Altamont (enter the site and enter 'altamont' in their search engine).

Gannets *(Lang Stewart)*

Upland location *(Ian Francis)*

Wind-farms and Birds No 2 - the RSPB position

The RSPB views climate change as the most serious, single, long-term threat to wildlife in Britain. Impacts in Britain are likely to be greatest on montane and coastal sites, for which Scotland is particularly important. Unchecked, climate change could see the loss from this country of some of our best-loved species and irreparable damage to some of our most important sites.

Replacing electricity generation from burning fossil fuels to renewable sources may help reduce the impacts of climate change on our wildlife. Therefore, RSPB supports both government targets for renewable energy and individual renewable energy developments, provided they are the right type and in the right place.

Most current proposals for new renewable energy schemes are for wind turbines and in Scotland most of these are onshore. Whether onshore or offshore, new wind farms should not be sited near important concentrations of birds, such as important wintering or staging sites, or sites with significant densities of breeding birds. Avoiding areas designated for their wildlife value under UK or EU law (SSSIs, SPAs, SACs) is an important first step in identifying sites which might be appropriate. In practice, this is not always happening and RSPB Scotland will treat renewable energy proposals which are likely to damage important sites no differently from any other type of damaging development.

Potential impacts of wind farms can be categorised as follows: (1) collision mortality with turbines and transmission wires; (2) direct habitat loss due to turbine bases and infrastructure such as roads; and (3) indirect habitat loss due to avoidance and habitat fragmentation. Quantifying actual impacts is difficult, as these will vary from site to site and species to species. This makes the extrapolation of results from (for example) individual sites in other countries unreliable, and that of results from small British sites with

relatively low wildlife interest inappropriate when trying to assess the likely impact of large schemes on sites of high wildlife interest. (Impacts of other 'mature' technologies, such as hydro or tidal barrage, are easier to assess; the impact of a tidal barrage on a site such as the Firth of Forth would be huge).

Renewable energy schemes in Scotland are regulated either by local planning authorities or by the Scottish Executive, depending on the size and type of scheme. RSPB Scotland addresses major wind farm proposals in Scotland through the statutory planning process. Most schemes with more than 2 turbines will require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) to be prepared by the developer in support of the application. Unfortunately, competition for sites has resulted in a number of hasty planning applications, supported by incomplete or inaccurate EIAs. In instances such as these, RSPB Scotland will object to applications on those grounds.

Current government targets for renewable energy in Scotland would, if they were met solely by installing wind turbines, result in wind farms with a combined footprint somewhere around the size of an island such as Islay or Mull. Although planning guidance from the Scottish Executive includes locational considerations, this does not include strategic guidance indicating which specific areas might be more or less suitable for new wind energy developments. RSPB Scotland is encouraging the Executive to produce such guidance.

There is also a need for better research to demonstrate more clearly what the impacts of wind turbines on bird populations actually are. Information on wind farm impacts on birds was recently collated by BirdLife International in a report to the Bern Convention*, but is restricted in scope in terms of species, habitat types and the number of examples, compared with the scale of development likely over the next few years. The role of the RSPB now is to try to ensure that the impacts of the current wave of renewable energy developments have the minimum impact on our most important bird sites and species, in Scotland as much as in the rest of the UK.

Richard Evans(RSPB)

**** http://www.coe.int/t/e/Cultural_Co-operation/Environment/Nature_and_biological_diversity/Nature_protection/sc23_inf12e.pdf?L=E***

Novar windfarm *(Ian Francis)*

Wind-farms and Birds No 3 - Scottish Power's approach

Scottish Power welcome the opportunity to contribute to an informed and balanced debate on Windfarms and the potential impact on bird populations.

Consequences for biodiversity and birds

The potential impacts of climate change on biological diversity have been well documented. The most recent article 'Extinction Risks from Climate Change' presents some alarming predictions of the extinction rates (Thomas *et al. Nature* 427, 145–148 (2004)). Their research involved the use of predictive modelling combined with the proven 'species area relationship' (smaller areas support less species) to estimate the potential extinction risks from 3 possible global warming scenarios. The article concludes that 18% to 35% of the species studied will become extinct by 2050. If this scenario is extrapolated to the global level the implications for Global Biological diversity are clearly highly alarming.

With regard to the impact of global warming on birds in particular the consequences are severe. Threatened birds such as the Scottish Crossbill, an endemic bird to Scotland, is predicted to lose its remaining habitat in Scotland and become globally extinct. The Capercaillie, another very threatened species already, is predicted to become extinct within the UK. Furthermore it is estimated that the UK may lose up to four-fifths of the numbers of some wintering birds including Purple Sandpiper and Turnstone (Dr. Mark Rehfishch, BTO)

Policy responses

Increasing evidence of the potential consequences of global warming over the past two decades has been the principle driver of the UK's climate change policy. Since the Kyoto protocol (1997) the UK Government has introduced a number of policies.

The UK's climate change programme was published in November 2000. This details how the UK plans to deliver its Kyoto target to cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 12.5% and to cut carbon dioxide emissions by 20% below 1990 levels by 2010. The Energy White Paper, published in February 2003, details the longer-term strategic approach to reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 60% by 2050.

To achieve these ambitious targets, innovative policy approaches are being implemented on both the supply and demand sides of the energy markets. Demand side policies include mechanisms to reduce the consumption of energy by domestic and corporate users whereas supply side policies aim to encourage the generation and supply of energy from renewable sources.

At present the Renewables Obligation (Scotland) Order 2002 is the primary legislation that is driving the supply side policy. This Order places a statutory obligation on all electricity suppliers to generate 10% of electricity from renewable sources by 2010. This is the main driver of renewable energy generation development in the UK.

Why wind-farms?

A considerable amount of effort has been devoted to developing wind turbine technology over the past 35 years. This technological development has had the dual effect of promoting the development of economies of scale in production and a competitive market. As a result of these factors, wind turbines are now able to produce electricity far more cheaply than any other form of renewable energy generation therefore making it a competitive and economically efficient technology. This coupled with the fact that the UK, particularly Scotland, has the best wind resource in Europe means that the 2010 target of 10% of electricity from renewable sources can be met comfortably through sensitively sited on and off shore Windfarms.

Barnacle Geese *(Arthur Grosset)*

Other renewable technologies such as Wave, Tidal Barrage, Tidal Stream, Biomass, Geothermal and Photovoltaic are being developed however, they are not sufficiently advanced yet to compete with wind turbines in terms of their efficiency and reliability. These technologies will however have an extremely valuable role to play in achieving the longer-term targets of 60% Carbon dioxide reductions below 1990 levels by 2050 outlined by The Energy White Paper. At present however Wind turbines are the best renewable technology that can allow the 10% target to be achieved.

Potential impacts on birds

It is accepted that Windfarms can potentially have 3 types of impacts on birds. 1) Collision with blades, 2) indirect habitat loss through disturbance and, 3) direct habitat loss through the installation of infrastructure (roads, turbines, hard-standings etc).

The potential impact of collision with turbine blades has been proven by a number of badly sited developments, particularly in Spain and America. These Windfarms were constructed in the early 80s and consist of early technology lattice towers with high revolution rotors which are arguably more disorientating to birds. More importantly however, these sites were selected with very little thought given to the ecological suitability of the site for Windfarm development.

Very little evidence exists to demonstrate an impact from the other two effects, nevertheless due to the sensitivity and nature conservation importance of many species potentially affected the precautionary principle should be employed to ensure that significant impacts are avoided.

Scottish Power's approach

To avoid significant impacts on bird species Scottish Power fully employ the precautionary principle. During site selection we ensure that unsuitable sites are filtered out through gaining the advice of ornithologists and consulting widely with consultees such as RSPB and SNH. During the project development stage we ensure that appropriate mitigation is developed and then implemented effectively during construction and operational stages. Good examples of the precautionary approach to development are provided by Scottish Power's experiences at Beinn an Tuirc Windfarm in Kintyre and Cruach Mhor Windfarm in Cowal.

At Beinn an Tuirc Windfarm, bird surveys during the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) (which is conducted on every site before development) established that the proposed site was within a pair of Golden Eagles' territory. To address this issue the Windfarm site was moved out of the core territory and extensive mitigation measures developed. The Windfarm area is 255 ha - during the EIA it was assumed that the eagles would be displaced from this area. To mitigate against this and provide a net gain to the eagles, 960 ha (almost 4 times the size of the Windfarm area) has been devoted to habitat management for Golden Eagles. Within this area 280 ha of mature sitka spruce plantation was felled to create new heathland habitat to support eagle prey species. The extensive monitoring and research programme which is being implemented to monitor the success of these measures and gather information to inform future Windfarm development shows that the eagles are successfully utilising the habitat management area.

At Cruach Mhor bird surveys during the EIA established that 2 breeding pairs of Hen Harriers and a pair of breeding Short-eared Owls were recorded in the vicinity of the proposed Windfarm site. To mitigate against any possible disturbance caused by the Windfarm, a Habitat Management Area (HMA) of 609 ha has been established. This has involved the felling of 180 ha of sitka spruce forest and the subsequent conservation management of that area. The Habitat Management Plan at Cruach Mhor is presently in its first year of operation. During site construction the Hen Harriers nested in the HMA and successfully reared 2 young.

In addition to the above measures Scottish Power recognise that successful conservation of species requires their conservation and enhancement in the wider countryside. To promote and implement this, Scottish Power are taking advantage of opportunities to enhance HMAs for other priority species such as Black Grouse. Also, we are funding conservation projects in the wider countryside such as the Argyll and Bute Black Grouse Recovery Project and an Agri-environment scheme best practice project.

In conclusion, Scottish Power believe that the UK has a tremendous potential for generating renewable energy that will ultimately help to reduce carbon dioxide and other green house gas emissions. This will help to slow anthropagenically induced climate change which in turn will minimise habitat loss and species extinction. Wind power has a particularly important contribution to make at this stage and this can be achieved in an ecologically sustainable way through sensitive siting and informed decision making.

David McArthur (Scottish Power)

Well at least we'll be safe from Magpies here!

The Marl Loch, Aberlady bay

The Marl Loch, behind the sand dunes to the east of Aberlady bay, has a long history, being recorded in the OS Maps of the 19th Cen. This expanse of fresh water is supplied by a spring on Gullane Hill (nowadays via a pipe) and over the years has become smaller, apparently due to the 'marl' being taken to improve the land.

In July 1961, there was a meeting of the Aberlady bay Biological Sub-committee with George Waterston in the Chair; also present Mr. Thomas Huxley (Nature Conservancy), Mr. A.S. Gillespie (retired Biology teacher) and Mr. Keith MacGregor (Scottish Ornithologists' Club). The minutes show that the Marl Loch was discussed at length due to concern about silting problems and most of it being covered up by a mat of weed. It was pointed out that the former stretch of open water constituted an interesting source of fresh water fauna, which was now threatened. In fact, the Loch had been a great source of educational material for Mid & East Lothian schools.

It was agreed that the work of cleaning the Loch might be done by an organised party of the Conservation Corps of the Council for Nature in the summer of 1962. On the 15th November 1961, as Chair of the Edinburgh University's branch of the Federation for Animal Welfare, I had invited George Waterston to speak on the 'Protection of Birds' at the (Dick) Vet College. At the end of his very interesting talk, I thanked him and asked if there was any project that we could help him with, to which he replied "Yes, the Marl Loch".

Following this up, the Sub-Committee met on the 15th February 1962 at 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh. In attendance were Brigadier E.F.E. Armstrong (Ist Field Director of the Conservation Corps), myself, and a Mr. Ware from (UFAW, Union for Animal Welfare). Brigadier Armstrong noted that East Lothian CC were the managers of the reserve and technically should pay for any improvements, but his group would support the work as it was a 'first' of its type in Scotland e.g. manager/owner lead.

I was asked to organise a working team of up to a dozen students for a week at the end of June 1962. Mr. Gillespie obtained permission to use the Aberlady Drill Hall and Mr. Waterston was asked to see if any financial aid from the County Council might be forthcoming, along with suitable tools. The accommodation was granted, the hall having cooking and toilet facilities. Costs amounted to £50 to £60 and would be covered by the Nature Conservancy and an individual contribution from each student. The last week in June 1962, our workforce of 9 students assembled in the Drill Hall ready for work. Unfortunately the weather had turned to rain with a cold wind blowing from the north east.

The Council had delivered tools to the site, as promised, but these were of the road mending type, the forks were for tar spreading, but the rope that they delivered was to prove very useful. We were faced with a thick, floating mat of weeds, which looked to be weight bearing, so we put on waders and made our way gingerly out to a point not too far from the bank edge. I remember vividly, the mat giving way, breath being taken away from me as my legs slid into the icy cold water. In the end we abandoned the waders in favour of bare legs and feet.

Our first attempts at cutting slices of the weed with large spades were not very successful. We found that small cuts at a time were easier, taking the slices over the mat to the side. Slow progress was made and because of the cold, the two cutters had to be relieved after about 20 minutes. However our Chairman, watching our predicament, rushed back home, grabbed his largest gardening fork and some light spades. The fork he took to the blacksmith and asked him to bend each tine in the middle to form a right angled rake. On returning, he attached a rope to the 'T' handle, put the fork grab hard into the soggy mass and with two or more pulling on the bank, the cutters pushed with arms and chests till the bundle was well up the bank. Simple, but very effective. It has to be said that this method was adopted for subsequent Conservation Corps work. With the lighter spades the cutting went on more swiftly - we cut a few feet wide, then gradually cut in towards the bank to make a channel, the easier to push the weed in. The mud certainly had its own pungent aroma but was certainly beneficial to the skin.

More work and view of the Loch as it was

The pond was not without its potential dangers. Older villagers told us that during WW 2, the Bay had been used for army training and troops had been in the habit of throwing hand grenades into it - rumours also told of un-removed mines. All three unexpected 'finds' were by the same student, Harry Ross. The first one gave us all a fright. Harry suddenly froze - pointing down into the water, indicating that he was standing on something suspicious. The object proved to be an anti-personnel grenade and the Bomb Squad was called from Edinburgh Castle to deal with it. The QC appeared a little mad, perhaps par for that Squad - he said it was safe, but that you could be fooled if it got a sharp bang like this; he then hit it with a hammer to demonstrate - nothing happened !

A very-light pistol was next to come up but after the grenade episode, we all agreed to freeze on the spot if we trod on anything suspicious and get a colleague to check it out. A lot of false alarms with large stones kept us on our toes. One day, Harry was to be seen wrestling with quite a large eel. During that week we were there, several notable things happened - a 16mm film was shot by Eric Loosey of the Nature Conservancy to be shortly shown on 'Nature Week' in the Museums and years later I took my younger daughter to see it in the new Museum Lecture Theatre.

A photograph of our project appeared in the Scotsman and an article in the Evening News. Brigadier Armstrong paid us a visit, leading his 'troops' over the Wooden Bridge. Nigel Tranter, who regularly walked behind the pond, came down to see what we were doing. He was immaculately dressed, so perhaps that led him to offer his bath at the cottage for us to clean up. My own method of getting clean was to go to a nearby tee on the golf course at about 4pm with soap and towel, cloth and scrubbing brush. There I met up with the Head Greenkeeper, who just happened to be there with hose and water, so I got a very effective shower.

It has to be said that the villagers were very friendly and appreciative of what we were doing. The landlord of the Wagon Inn adopted us and had free pints waiting for us outside on fine nights. Mr Gillespie, a retired Heriots Biology teacher, had some of us up to his flat one night and handed over a whole pile of his notes on the Loch compiled over many years. Our President passed them over to the Nature Conservancy (now with the SNH). Mr. Watt, the Warden of the Reserves, took us on a walk round the Reserve in the spring and when we started work, he kept an eye on our equipment and tents. At the end of our week, we had cleared approx 20 sq ft of open water. Hard, cold work but rewarding. The Biological Sub-Committee inspected the Loch and it was agreed that a useful start had been made; there was admiration for the work carried out by the volunteers under such arduous conditions.

Another work week was organised for June 63. This time a sign using the UFAW logo was erected to explain our efforts to the public. As Aberlady Gala Day fell during this week, we built a successful float for it featuring our mascot – 'Bellhaven Bill the Sailor'.

Before we left, a swan, ducks and a Moorhen were seen on the Loch. Birds of note nesting during the years we were there were Long-eared Owls nesting in a nearby copse and a pair of Short-eared Owls nesting not far away in the long grass. One spring, we were able to observe a long trail of Toads making for their spawning area down a well worn path - several males hitching a lift on one female.

Finally the Council took pity on us and instructed Crudens to get their JCB Digger, which just happened to be moving old Tank Blocks near us, to come and finish the job, and also make some islands and channels. It is interesting to note that in 1978 a report on the future of the Reserve mentions the Loch, stating that it should always be maintained.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all those who provided information and photos: UFAW, SNH, BTCV, East Lothian Historical Society. Also if any Members have more recollections of this project, and especially the whereabouts of 16mm film, I would like to hear from them. Finally thanks to Keith Holt for all his computer work.

Eric Miller

(left) A good job done. (below) Russell Young relaxing at the Loch - as it is today
(Jimmy Maxwell)

NOTES & COMMENT

'lude singe cuckoo...'

This male Cuckoo was photographed (by Digiscope) in Cowgills Glen near Biggar in mid-May this year. It had responded to some of my vocal imitations of its usual 'advertisement' call and approached us in obvious excitement. Its own '*cu – coo*' calls were liberally interspersed with a variety of throaty '*gowk*' sounds as it flew round us.

We noticed that in each '*cu – coo*' call, the bird's beak opened to make the shorter, percussive '*cu*', which was accompanied by an upward jerk of the neck. On the second ('*coo*') syllable however, the beak was always closed, only a slight swelling of the throat indicating this sound.

Intrigued by this, I checked *BWP* to find this phenomenon clearly described, but no explanation given as to how the bird produces such a clear second note without opening its beak. There obviously is a simple explanation for this type of sound production – I wonder how many other birds also employ it in their calls?

Jimmy Maxwell

Cuckoo *(Lang Stewart)*

Observations of Ring Ouzels in central Perthshire

During the course of BTO Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) work, Nick Borissow and I travel the length of Glen Turret and upper Glen Almond in central Perthshire. Since we began this work in 2000, we have made casual observations of Ring Ouzels *Turdus torquatus* in the two glens. In 2002, NE led an SOC outing up Glen Turret, during which, in less than ideal weather, we counted 8 male Ring Ouzels (6 in song) and 3 females. In 2003, having completed our BBS squares, we found the opportunity to travel the full length of both glens to count all Ring Ouzels seen and heard in almost ideal weather conditions. The following note is a summary of these opportunistic visits, mainly to make known the estimated population of the species in the two glens.

The visits were undertaken on 30th (Glen Turret) and 31st (Glen Almond) May 2003. By the time we had come off the hills, it was past midday, at a time when one would expect a lull in bird song. Nevertheless, conditions were such that, within each glen, Ring Ouzel song could be heard relatively easily over distances of up to 800 m. Frequent stops allowed us to ascertain each site from which a Ring Ouzel was singing, and also to scan for other, silent, birds. At this period in the breeding cycle, birds are feeding young of the first brood, and we observed several birds carrying food.

Glen Turret

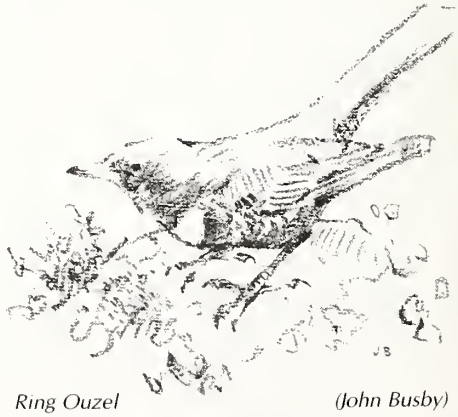
Glen Turret is a relatively narrow glen, with a steep rocky and scree covered SW-facing slope, and a less craggy and grassier NE-facing slope on the far side of Loch Turret. The length of the glen above the Turret dam is 6 km while the width is between 1 and 1.5 km from ridge to ridge. Vegetation on the rocky slope consists of a mixture of heather and blaeberry, with patches of muir-burn and isolated trees, creating a mosaic of habitats. On 30th May we counted 7 males in song, plus a further 6 males (two groups of 2 and 4) showing antagonistic behaviour, during which birds were posturing and manoeuvring for position among the rocks, the white gorgets showing very conspicuously. Two females were seen, one of which belonged to a pair carrying food. Only one singing bird was detected from the opposite slope. Two nests were found in 2001, both in or under heather clumps low down the slope. One fledged 4 young, while the other was predated. During the 2002 visit, birds were also singing near the head of the glen, on crags that were silent during the 2003 visit.

Glen Almond

Glen Almond is both longer and wider (13 km long and 1.5–2 km wide) than Glen Turret. The south-facing slope is rocky with scree along the eastern (lower) half, but with fewer crags along the western (upper) portion. The north-facing slope is similar. The foot of the glen itself consists of areas of improved grassland, which become less frequent further west. The vegetation on the slopes is a mosaic of heather, bracken and unimproved grassland. Along the upper part of the glen, we found 5 Ring Ouzels singing only where narrow rocky gulleys were present, there being few rocky outcrops and little or no scree. Birds were well-spaced, with a mean separation of 1 km. Only one bird sang from the north-facing slope, next to a gulley within an area of sparsely planted young Scots Pine and Birch. The only female seen was one of a pair carrying food.

The lower 6 km of the glen held the most birds. Here, we found 15 singing males on the south-facing slope, and 3 on the opposite hillside. In addition there was one bird just outside the glen in the Sma' Glen. The mean separation distance of the birds on the south-facing hillside was 400 m, very approximately similar to nest separation distances found by Arthur & White (2001) in the Angus glens.

Ring Ouzel habitat in both glens is clearly most suitable on south or SW-facing slopes. This may be due to a combination of vegetation differences, microclimate and geomorphology, although in Glen Turret there is far less rocky habitat on the



Ring Ouzel *(John Busby)*

NE-facing slope. It is estimated that Glen Turret may hold up to 15 territories, while Glen Almond may host up to 30 territories. These are very rough estimates based on the 2002 and 2003 counts and can in no way be compared with the recent and more detailed surveys carried out in Angus (Arthur & White 2001) and Deeside (Rebecca 2001). Nevertheless, they do suggest a healthy population of the species in these Perthshire glens.

Song

The song of the Ring Ouzel varies considerably, but in general, most songs consist of three or four clear but simple notes. Stemple (2003) has shown that the most complex song is heard early in the day, becoming simpler with time. Groups of birds from a particular glen or area also exhibit dialects. Our observations were made in the afternoon, when simple song would be expected, and there was no detectable difference between Ring Ouzel songs in the two glens, which are only 3 km apart at their closest point. Most song heard consisted of 3 or 4 monosyllabic notes, '*tirr-tirr-tirr*'; occasionally a disyllabic 'tidirr-tidirr-tidirr' was heard. Song was relatively easy to detect, and it was evident that rocks and scree allowed song to be projected out over the glen. Recordings available to us do not replicate the song with which we have become familiar, probably because many of the recordings have been made outside the UK. However, the tape supplied by the BTO to assist BBS surveyors in upland areas illustrates the song of Scottish Ring Ouzels well.

We thank the Glen Turret, Auchnafree and West Glenalmond estates for access permission.

Norman Elkins,
18 Scotstarvit View, Cupar, Fife KY15 5DX

Request for information on House Sparrow's nests

In *SBN 71* a request was made for information on House Sparrows' nests. Unfortunately, Harry Dott's e-mail address was incorrectly printed and should read harry_dott@hotmail.com (don't forget the underscore between "harry" and "dott") or write to Harry Dott, 12/25 Ethel Terrace, Edinburgh EH10 5NA. If any member has tried in vain to send information to Harry he would greatly appreciate you resending the information. Apologies to all concerned from the Editorial team.

Short-eared Owls

Breeding Short-eared Owls are widely distributed in Scotland, occurring in heather moorland, young plantations and coastal dunes. Numbers fluctuate from year to year, however, dependent on the density of their main prey (voles). Breeding birds are not site faithful, as they move to areas of high prey density, and many will not breed if prey numbers are low. The Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group received records for only 23 territories in 2003, but this under-recording is typical and the size of the current Scottish breeding population is not clearly understood. Reference to *Scottish Bird Reports* demonstrates that more birds than this are usually recorded (e.g. reports from at least 120 sites in 2000). It is hoped that a survey might be organised in the future to improve our knowledge of this species. One of the aims of the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group is to bring all sources of data on birds of prey and owls together and one of the roles of the SOC in this partnership is to provide casual records through our membership and the Local Bird Recorder network.

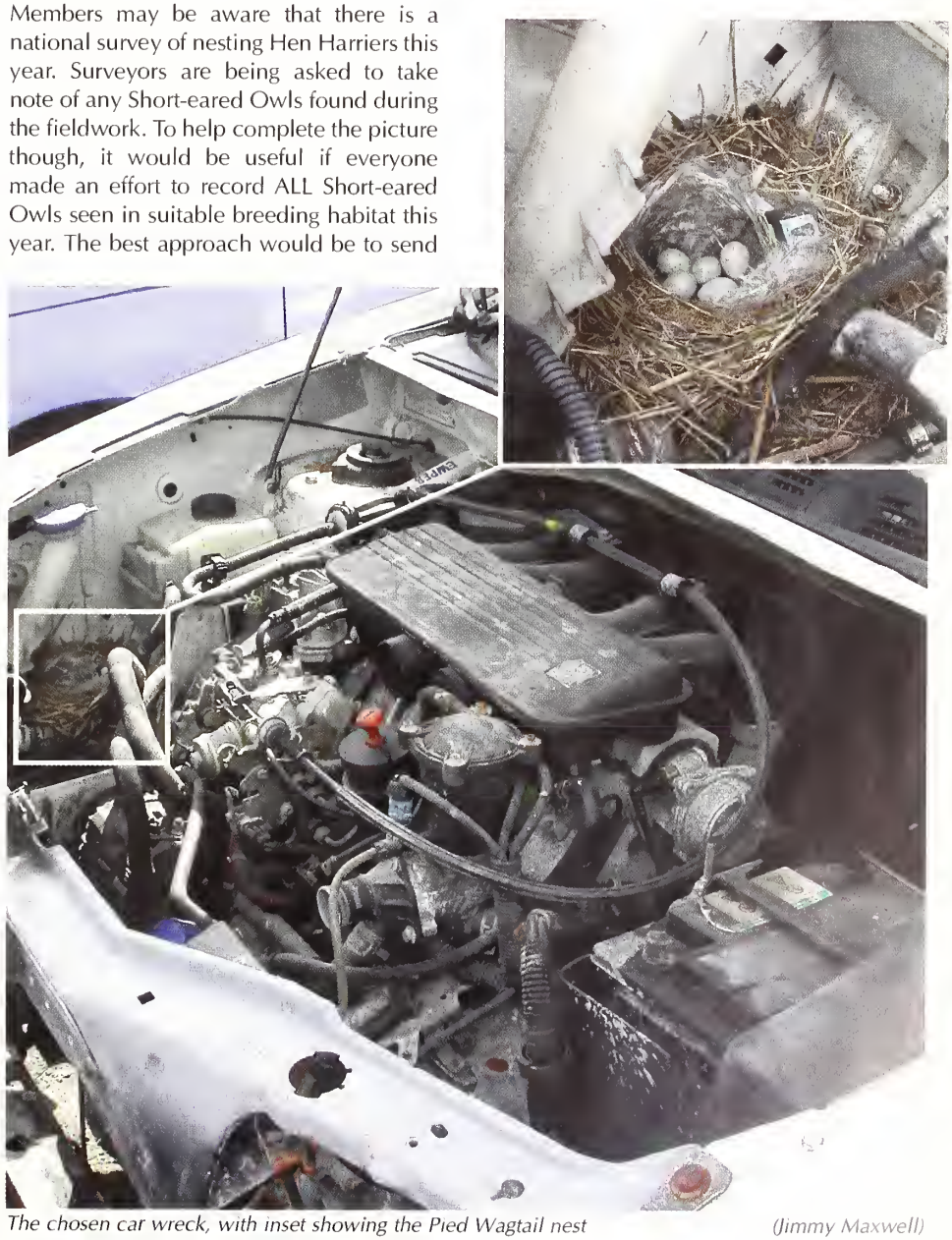
Members may be aware that there is a national survey of nesting Hen Harriers this year. Surveyors are being asked to take note of any Short-eared Owls found during the fieldwork. To help complete the picture though, it would be useful if everyone made an effort to record ALL Short-eared Owls seen in suitable breeding habitat this year. The best approach would be to send records to your local bird recorder by the end of the breeding season. Scottish local bird recorders are listed at the back of the Scottish Bird Report, and on the SOC website.

Mark Holling, SOC representative on Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group

Nest location with a difference

Pied Wagtails nest in some peculiar places – this one has been frequenting a scrap yard near Newmains for several years. Each year it chooses a "new" model of old car in which to build its nest. The scrap yard owner proudly showed where this year's nest was tucked away among the pipes and wires in the engine compartment of a wrecked van. The nest-lining has a mixture of feathers and plastic and holds five eggs.

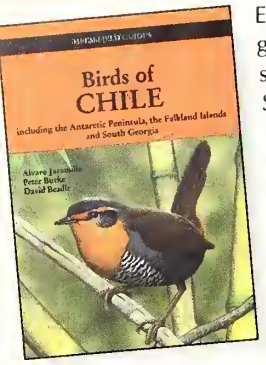
Dave Abraham



The chosen car wreck, with inset showing the Pied Wagtail nest *(Jimmy Maxwell)*

BOOK REVIEWS

Birds of Chile. Alvaro Jaramillo, Peter Burke & David Beadle ISBN 0-7136-4688-8 Christopher Helm £19.99.



English language guides for the southern cone of South America are in short supply, so this book (which also deals with the Antarctic Peninsula, the Falklands/Malvinas and South Georgia) is to be welcomed. The book also includes an appendix covering sundry taxonomic problems. Chile, of course, is a very strange shape with a wide range of habitats, and hence birds. It seems a pity that the authors did not also extend their range to cover Argentina also, at least south of the River Plate. However we field tested it in Argentinian Patagonia, where it seemed to work in the south, but less well on the east coast in Chubut province. It is undoubtedly more useful for the birds it covers than the now rather elderly Collins 'Birds of Southern South America & Antarctica' and is helpful on sorting out similar species. There is a tendency (understandable in view of the authors' Canadian base) to offer comparisons with North American species which are not necessarily all that helpful to Scottish birdwatchers. If you are going to Chile, though, this is certainly the book to take.

John Davies

The Migration Atlas: Movements of the Birds of Britain and Ireland *edited by Chris Werham, Mike Toms, John Marchant, Jacquie Clark, Gavin Siriwardena and Stephen Baillie. 2002. T & A D Poyser. 884 pp, Hbk. ISBN 0-7136-6514-9. £65.*

Many birdwatchers when asked what aspect of their hobby they enjoy most, say 'migration'. To them, this long-awaited volume will have soon become a 'bible' containing an unrivalled quantity of information between two covers – a summary of previously published information plus a mass of new data and interpretation.

The book uses as its main data source the results of the British and Irish Ringing Scheme which has been operating since 1909. After five introductory chapters, the bulk of the book comprises 192 species accounts written by as many expert authors. There are then accounts for 73 species with little ringing data and a 61-page reference list and several appendices. An impressive 884 pages in all.

The layout of the species accounts is pleasing to the eye and many maps and diagrams are used to display the data. However, after delving into various species, I soon found it easier to use the text to get to the key conclusions as the maps took more time to digest. Some of the data seem superfluous (at least for some species) and there is a fair amount of white space as each of the species starts on a new page.

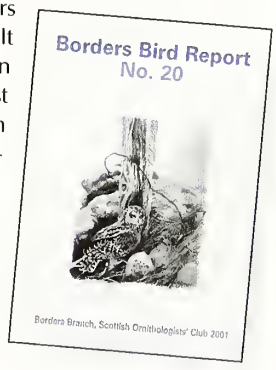
The book provides valuable summaries of work that has been continuing for many years, but it also highlights the paucity of knowledge of many of the trans-Saharan migrants. For example, did you know that it is not known where in Africa the British and Irish Cuckoos spend the winter? I also enjoyed reading about the little-written-about Scandinavian Rock Pipit, so there is something for everyone in this massive tome.

Recently voted the "Best Bird Book of the Year 2003", there is no doubt that this publication will remain an invaluable reference for many years to come. Certainly, the team of authors involved in the SOC's 'Birds of Scotland' project will be drawing heavily on its content as one of the major reference works produced by the BTO.

Ian J Andrews

Borders Bird Report **21** *edited by Ray Murray, ISSN 0964-0722, £6.50 obtainable from editor at 4 Bellfield Crescent, Eddleston, Peebles EH45 8RQ*

This is the report for 2001 and 2002 – Ray, of course, also has the responsibility of producing SBR in his 'spare time'. It is well produced in the customary format with photographs and plenty of information about what was reported and where in the Borders over the two years, and a report from the Borders Ringing Group. It also includes an article on the first successful British breeding of Red-necked Grebes, which includes tables on the numerous attempts (in the Borders and elsewhere) over the past 30 years; and useful information on the SOC Bird Records spreadsheet devised by Ray and Mark Holling, which everyone with access to Excel is encouraged to use.



John Davies

Flight Identification of European Seabirds by Anders Blomdahl, Bertil Breife and Niklas Holmström 2003. *Christopher Helm. 374 pages, many colour photographs. Softback, £35. ISBN 0-7136-6020-1*

By now, we've become so accustomed to high quality publications from the Christopher Helm stable that we could be excused for simply expecting just one more. Let me start by stating that this is *not* simply "one more."

Seawatching isn't everyone's cup of tea involving, as it does, a degree of masochism which borders on the totally insane. But the rewards, as anyone addicted to this branch of birding will tell you, are immense and generally unforgettable. So, how do you go about producing a book which handles both the frequently distant images experienced by seawatchers, and yet captures the magic of the moment as your first White-billed Diver flies past? This book manages both, with photographs ranging from hazy flight shots of migrating divers to pin-sharp and breathtaking shots of swans and geese. Most importantly, though, all the flight shots are instructive for beginner and seasoned observer alike.

The obvious enthusiasm of all the authors shines through in the text. Who would deny that the most likely first reaction to an adult Ross's Gull is "What a beauty!" – the plumage details for the written description can wait till later. Their commitment to seawatching is highlighted in an introductory section which deals with many of the problems likely to influence your effectiveness. These might vary from where best to watch from, to the perils of identifying hybrid gulls: getting the relative shapes and sizes right, to correctly assessing light conditions. There is also a useful guide to what might be regarded as the *best* seawatching sites in Western Europe (can't think why Turnberry Point wasn't in there!!).

For those who derive fascination from the many variations in the large white-headed gull group, this book will offer useful advice on what, for example, actually constitutes a *Caspian* Gull, whilst offering hope for those who see it as a species.

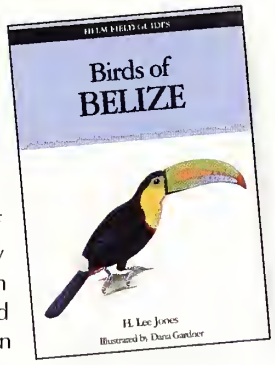
Perhaps the most surprising omission is that of the phalaropes – surely if Blue-winged Teal and Ferruginous Duck qualify as *sea*birds, one might have expected the inclusion of all three phalaropes.

However, this is really a minor gripe. Anyone who already seawatches and buys this book will be well rewarded by the high quality of its content. Anyone who has not yet been bitten by the seawatching bug may well now be encouraged to get out of their beds on a dreich autumn dawn with a force-10 North-westerly blowing and squally showers forecast. It's that sort of book – written by real enthusiasts for both those who are committed and for those who are about to be!

Angus Hogg

Birds of Belize. H Lee Jones ISBN 0-7236-6760-5 Christopher Helm £29.99

Two books about an area apparently not much visited by SOC members. The BOU Checklist is in the customary format, with a lengthy introduction to the island, species accounts of all birds found, maps, photographs of topography and some birds, and a bibliography. The Helm field guide to Belize has a section of plates with very brief notes on habitat and appearance on the opposite page. There is then a section giving rather more information on each page, and finally a set of distribution maps. I suspect most users would have preferred the more conventional format with text, maps and illustrations all on one spread.



Birds of Northern India *by Richard Grimmett and Tim Inskipp 2003. Published by A&C Black London 304pp. 119 colour plates Pbk. ISBN 0-7136-5167-9 £19.99*

As world travel in search of birds is commonplace these days and to satisfy the subsequent demand for compact handbooks with accurate colour plates, the publishers have introduced this excellent series of Helm Field Guides. More than 800 species are covered and the colour plates are very good, being quite adequate to identify most birds of this rich and diverse area of the sub-continent. Where relevant, distinctive races and immature plumages have been depicted opposite each plate and a concise text is available for speedy identification.

The text, and most of the plates, is based on the authors' earlier and more substantive work of the same title published in 1998. The first 45 pages cover important topics such as main habitats, birdwatching areas, family summaries and national organisations with helpful addresses, telephone and e-mail contacts.

To anyone contemplating a trip to this wonderful area, the book is an absolute must and represents great value for money. I only wish as good a guide had been available when I travelled this area more than 20 years ago!

David Clugston

BTO/RSPB BirdWeb

The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) have launched 'BirdWeb'. This new on-line initiative will link together a wide range of bird surveys, their results and information on the changing fortunes of UK's birds. In particular, it will allow members of the public and more skilled birdwatchers alike to become involved in a wide range of bird surveys.

BirdWeb is developing rapidly. It has a home page within each of the BTO and RSPB web sites; this explains what BirdWeb is about and provides a special feature on one or more surveys. Currently, the special feature is on the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (BBS). An exciting development of BirdWeb is that BBS recorders can now enter their data on-line while anyone can find out the results. Linked to the home page are other sections giving a summary list of surveys in which people can get involved, and survey results. More and more surveys, schemes and information will be added to BirdWeb over time.

In practice, BirdWeb is an index of surveys and information. People who want to get involved or simply to find out more are taken to survey-specific pages on one of these organisations' websites - for example, Big Garden Bird Watch is on the RSPB website while Migration Watch is on the BTO website.

These two organisations are of the view that BirdWeb is an exciting new development and would be particularly interested in receiving feedback from SOC members about the site. Feedback can be either by letter or by email to science@rspb.org.uk or info@bto.org.

Ian Francis

Birds of Scotland (*BS3*)

Details were given in *SBN* 68 (June 2003) of a major new Club project aimed at producing a book on the birds of Scotland (informally known as *BS3*), to supersede Baxter & Rintoul's *The Birds of Scotland* (1953) and Valerie Thom's *Birds in Scotland* (1986). At that time an Editorial team had been formed and it was intended to approach 'guest authors' to write introductory chapters and species accounts, with publication aimed at 2007.

Considerable progress has been made since that initial announcement and more than 120 'guest authors' have been recruited. As at the end of January 2004 over 100 species accounts have been written and they are now coming in to the editorial team at a rate of at least one per day. The editorial team is still very much on schedule for a 2007 publication, although the book continues to expand and it is now envisaged that it will be 800 – 900 pages in length with similar sized pages to the recently published BTO *Migration Atlas*. It is estimated that the word count will equal Baxter & Rintoul and Thom combined and will be lavishly illustrated by the many photographs that Club members have been submitting for publication. In particular we continue to invite photographers to submit their work to the annual SOC Photographic Competition which, for the next two years, will be run in conjunction with *BS3*.

Ron Forrester

Handy birding information

To facilitate birding in Forth and Argyll areas, James Towill has created two new websites. They also appear with others in our own SOC website: **http://www.the-soc.org.uk**

Group name: ForthBirding
Group home page: **http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ForthBirding** Group email address: **ForthBirding@yahoogroups.com**

Group name: ArgyllBirding
Group home page: **http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ArgyllBirding** Group email address: **ArgyllBirding@yahoogroups.com**

Early Osprey work (RSPB)

RSPB Scotland Centenary

In 2004, RSPB Scotland is celebrating 100 years of working for Scotland's wildlife. The last century has seen many successes, but we know that threats to wildlife are ever present and we must continue to develop RSPB Scotland's work. With support, we will be able to provide a better future for Scotland's wildlife, for ourselves and for future generations. A great deal has changed during the last 100 years, and some notable milestones are listed below:

1904

- Society membership subscription cost five shillings
- The Society is incorporated by the Royal Charter: now the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- St Kilda included within the 1880 Wild Bird Act
- Peregrines identified nesting in Edinburgh's Craigleith area and given protection by the local police and council
- The first 'watchers' had been appointed and officially employed to observe Pintails at Loch Leven

1924

- Sir Herbert Maxwell launches the first RSPB local group in Scotland

1954

- Ospreys returned to Speyside after a forty-year absence
- George Waterston appointed as the first Scottish representative

1967

- Vane Farm becomes the first Nature Centre Reserve

1975

- With Scottish Natural Heritage, RSPB Scotland start the Sea-Eagle re-introduction

1984

- 100th RSPB reserve is purchased at Wood of Cree

1992

- First wild Red Kite chick fledged from a Black Isle nest after successful re-introduction with Scottish Natural Heritage

2003

- Big Garden Birdwatch has 18,000 Scottish surveys and identifies that the Chaffinch is still Scotland's most common garden bird

2004

- Today, with the help of RSPB members, supporters and volunteers, we now manage more than 70 nature reserves across Scotland, from Shetland to the Solway. We continue to base our conservation decisions on scientific research and lobby to ensure that all levels of government make the best decisions for Scotland's wildlife. We work, often in partnership with others, on issues including wildlife crime and site protection, agriculture, water management, climate change, marine and fisheries, education, biodiversity and forestry. In all these, our focus is on Scotland's birds and their conservation

We hope you can be part of our centenary celebrations in 2004. There are many ways to do this:

- Come along to one of our many centenary events
- Get involved with your local RSPB group
- Vote in our awards to acknowledge those who help Scotland's wildlife
- Consider volunteering for us – we have opportunities to match your skills
- Become a member or join one of your family as a gift
- Visit one of our beautiful nature reserves and enjoy a great day out with us.

To find out more, telephone 0131 311 6500, email rspb.Scotland@rspb.org.uk, visit our website www.rspb.org.uk/scotland, or write to: RSPB Scotland, Dunedin House, 25 Ravelston Terrace, Edinburgh EH4 3TP.

Caroline Orr-Ewing

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9/10 rating review by *Birdwatching* magazine

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RECENT REPORTS

A Review of spring 2004

The place to be in Scotland so far this year, in terms of rarities and scarcities, has been the Outer Hebrides. This year has been especially high profile with good birds being mentioned from there on Birdline Scotland on an almost daily basis.

Its stars of the winter period all remained into the spring with male **Snowy Owl** again on the South Ford, South Uist on 31st Mar–12th Apr, the **American Coot** on South Uist last seen on 7th Apr (with the bird at Loch of Clickimin (Shetland) last seen on 5th Apr), the female **Redhead** on Barra last reported on 15th Apr and the female **Harlequin Duck** on Lewis until 17th May. In April and May Lewis once again played host to 'multiple' **White-billed Diver** sightings with at least five present in the Skigersta area between 15th Apr–5th May whilst elsewhere in Scotland another seven birds were reported in the period from Shetland (3), Highland (2), Argyll and off Collieston (NES) on 23rd May.

Harlequin Duck, Lewis *(Paul Hackett)*

Indeed May on the Outer Hebrides almost topped what had gone on in the winter with the highest ever day count of **Pomarine Skuas** occurring on the 7th May, when 2,019 were counted in 6 hours going north through The Minch past the south-east end of Lewis. This unprecedented movement along the east side of the islands took place in flat calm conditions after a period of strong north-north-westerly winds. The total of Pomarine Skuas counted passing the Aird an Runair headland on North Uist was

Bufflehead, Lewis *(Martin Scott)*

396 between 9th April and 19th May, with a highest day count of 156 on 22nd April, whilst 369 **Long-tailed Skuas** were logged past there in May, including 209 on 18th. There was a good scatter of Long-tailed Skua records from elsewhere in Scotland in May including an unusual cluster of North Sea records on 22nd, when nine different were reported between Peterhead and Fife Ness, mostly from Angus.

If it was not entirely vintage skua watching from Aird an Runair this May then this was partly compensated for by the drake **Bufflehead** that flew north past there on 10th May, with almost certainly the same bird then seen at Loch Branahuie, Lewis on 20th (only the second record for Scotland after one on South Uist in 1980). Also in May, on Lewis, the most controversial wildfowl record of the year occurred in the form of a drake **Cinnamon Teal** on Loch Tuamister on 13th–31st. With a supporting cast of Nearctic wildfowl to die for on the Outer Hebrides this year what price this being a genuine vagrant? Then again, as a relatively common escapee in Western Europe, what price that being its origin?

It was also superb for North American gulls on the Outer Hebrides with record numbers of **Ring-billed Gulls** seen with Scottish record counts of five together at Peninerine, South Uist on 21st March and four there on 22nd. Also in April on South Uist, sightings of adult **Bonaparte's Gulls** came from Peninerine on 1st–9th, near Loch Bee on the 10th, at Peninerine again on 18th–22nd and North Bay on the 23rd with in May, an adult seen on Handa (Highland) on 20th and then relocated nearby at Scourie on 22nd–23rd. At least two 1st-winter **American Herring Gulls** were also seen on the Outer Hebrides during March and April.

American Herring Gull, Lewis *(Martin Scott)*

Ring-billed Gull, South Uist *(Paul Hackett)*

Bonaparte's Gull, South Uist *(Paul Hackett)*

Nearctic waders also put on a good Scottish showing with an **Upland Sandpiper** present on Foula (Shetland) on 4th–8th May – only the second spring record for Britain (the previous one having been on St Kilda). A **Long-billed Dowitcher** was present in Holm (Orkney) on 27th–30th Apr whilst after the fantastic autumn last year, five **Pectoral Sandpipers** were seen in NES, Moray, Orkney, Argyll and a very early bird at Loch Stiapavat, Lewis on 11th Apr. Other wader highlights included a **Stone Curlew** on Foula (Shetland) on 14th May, a **Kentish Plover** at Pool of Virkie on 24th–27th Apr (only the second record for Shetland), eight **Temminck's Stints** in May between 8th–27th (including four together at Monikie CP (Angus)) and nine **Avocets** seen: a party of four on the Eden Estuary (Fife) on 31st Mar–9th Apr, 3 at Skinflats (Upper Forth) on 15th Apr and 2 at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES) on 14th May. Nearby an immature, probably female, **Snowy Owl** was present in the Collieston/Rattray Head area between the 3rd–15th May whilst a **Spoonbill** was at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg from 17th May. A **Great White Egret** was on the reserve (after being initially seen at Meikle Loch) on 18th–20th May with further birds being seen on Mainland Shetland on 25th–30th Apr, on Islay (Argyll) on 10th–17th May, at Kilconquhar Loch on 29th Apr–1st May (second record for Fife) and at the Baron's Haugh RSPB reserve on 31st Mar – the earliest ever Scottish spring record and second Lanarkshire record. Eight **Little Egrets** were seen, all (bar an over wintering bird on Shetland), occurring in May, including two together in Caithness at Sandside Bay then Loch of Mey from 28th. Up to nine **Common Cranes** were seen from 16th Apr and up to six **White Storks**, including some definite free-flying colour-ringed feral birds, though unringed birds were seen in Fife, Ayrshire and Dumfries & Galloway.

White Stork, Fife *(Stuart Rivers)*

Amongst the usual scatter of **White-tailed Eagle** records away from usual areas, a Finnish colour-ringed bird was seen at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES) on 3rd–5th Mar. Elsewhere amongst raptors, a male **Red-footed Falcon** was seen at Ardvule Point, South Uist (Outer Hebrides) on 9th May and two **Black Kites** were reported, both from Argyll: on Mull on 20th Apr and on Coll on 23rd May (there is only one previous accepted record for Argyll). Three **Rough-legged Buzzards** were seen in May between 9th–13th in Moray, NES and on Fair Isle, a **Honey Buzzard** was seen on Yell (Shetland) on 31st May and there were three sightings of **Montagu's Harrier** in May at Aberdeen (NES) on 25th and at Hule Moss (Borders) the same day and an adult male which was present all day on 23rd May at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES) performing superbly in front of the visitor centre on the reserve.

The over-wintering though little reported **Rufous Turtle Dove** in Caithness was still present on at least 24th March whilst an intriguing record concerned a **Cory's Shearwater** found dead at Aberlady Bay (Lothian) on 21st Apr. The first spring scarcities and rarities amongst passerines were reported in April with four migrant **Great Grey Shrikes** seen on the Northern Isles - other typical April fare there included 11 **Hawfinches** with another seven migrants reported in May

Snowy Owl, N-E Scotland *(Chris Jones)*

Great Grey Shrike, N-E Scotland *(Harry Scott)*

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Dotterel, Lothian *(Calum Scott)*

including unusual records on Skye (Highland) and Tiree (Argyll). Also in April, up to six **Hoopoes** were seen, on Orkney, in Fife and Angus with a male **Serin** at Baltasound, Unst on 17th–27th (fifth record for Shetland). A **Short-toed Lark** was on Fair Isle on 23rd–25th – the second earliest spring record there with two rare mainland Scotland sightings then in May: at Tyninghame (Lothian) and Kilchoan (Highland) both on 16th . A **Red-rumped Swallow** was at Loch of Hillwell (Shetland) on 30th Apr with three others then seen in May: on Shetland, Orkney and on Coll (Argyll).

There were two main concentrations of scarcities in May, around the 8th–10th and 29th–31st both after periods of easterly winds. Shetland and Orkney of course had their share, but unlike the last two springs there were also some goodies for mainland Scotland birders. Showing up best amongst scarcities was perhaps **Red-backed Shrike** with 62 seen, including five different in Lothian on 8th–10th May, four at St Abb's Head (Borders) on 9th and remarkable counts of eight on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) and nine on Fair Isle, both on 31st. Around 18 **Bluethroats** were seen from 3rd May including five on Fair Isle on 8th, 16 **Wrynecks** were seen from 30th Apr, almost all of which were on Shetland, including three on Fair Isle on 8th May, four **Common Rosefinches** were on Shetland from 26th May and at least four **Marsh Warblers** were seen on 30th–31st; 3+ on Fair Isle and one on North Ronaldsay. Five **Icterine Warblers** were logged in May including one at Skateraw (Lothian) on 9th–10th, four **Golden Orioles** were seen from 28th May including one in Lothian, a male **Red-breasted Flycatcher** was at Baltasound, Unst (Shetland) on 9th May, a **Rose-coloured Starling** on Fair Isle from 27th May and two **Bee-eaters** were seen on 31st: on Shetland Mainland and on Westray (Orkney). Eight **Common Nightingales** were reported from 2nd May onwards making it the best showing in Scotland since 1992 - all were on Orkney and Shetland, apart from one on Tiree (Argyll) on 2nd–4th.

Rarities included a male **Collared Flycatcher** on Fair Isle on 9th–12th May, a male **Rustic Bunting** on Foula (Shetland) on 26th May, single **Arctic Redpolls** in May on Foula on 5th–7th and on North Ronaldsay on 10th with a **Great Reed Warbler** on the latter island on 31st (only the third Orkney record). A **Red-throated Pipit** was also seen on 31st on nearby Fair Isle with another on St Kilda (Outer Hebrides) on 7th and two **Thrush Nightingales** were seen in May: on Foula (Shetland) on 7th and on the Isle of May on 9th–10th. Two **Yellow-browed Warblers** were seen on Shetland in May: on Fetlar on 6th and on Bressay on 7th–8th – only the second and third spring records for Shetland.

Angus Murray

Most of the above is compiled from records submitted to Birdline Scotland during the period but special thanks must go to Eric Meek (Orkney), Deryk Shaw (Fair Isle), Simon Wellock (Coll) and John Bowler (Tiree) for additional monthly summaries from their respective locales.

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Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the SOC. It acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and disseminates information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. It is published four times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices are welcomed and should be sent to the Editor at the address below no later than five weeks before publication. The views expressed are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication.

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The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) was established by a group of Scottish ornithologists who met together in the rooms of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society in Edinburgh on 24th March 1936.

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